

Politburo Session
December 17, 1987

Gorbachev. *On the outcomes of the visit to Washington*. This is bigger than Geneva or Reykjavik, with full understanding of their importance and the fact that without them Washington would not have happened. It is an even more significant sign that the course we have set is being realized. We are once again convinced that the best line is the principled and constructive one. And the main lesson we learned from this is a lesson for the future.

Much less apparent in Washington was the manner Reagan used with us in the beginning—making accusations, putting forth claims, blaming us for the crises of the modern world, and presenting himself as all good and right, in a word: [Reagan appeared] in the role of either a prosecutor or a teacher. But by the first conversation we had already agreed on this matter, even though there was a moment of a certain sharpness. I told him: “You are not a prosecutor and I am not a defendant. You are not a teacher and I am not a pupil. And vice versa. Otherwise we will not be able to do anything.”

This was an important moment in establishing mutual understanding with the American leadership. It was probably even a key moment in finding a common language: speaking as equals and seriously, each keeping his ideology to himself. Of course this time we also had a response to the usual human rights claims that by now set our teeth on edge. But we did not succumb to that temptation. This approach justified itself when the talks entered the level of concrete discussion of specific problems: the discussion was realistic without any kind of euphoria, without illusions, with a readiness for reasonable compromises and mutual constructiveness.

The central moment of the visit was the INF Treaty. We had total understanding—and we arrived with this, having the full support of the Politburo—that everything would depend on the outcome of this question: the entire development of Soviet-American relations and the normalization of the international situation in general.

Therefore it was very important not to give up in the face of military-technical difficulties, which were by no means minor. The fact that we overcame them was in large part due to our strong policy determination to cross this barrier, to achieve the Treaty. As for untying the truly difficult military-technical knots, I must say our colleagues were at their best, and I want to acknowledge the experienced work of Marshal Akhromeev and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Bessmertnykh.

The experience of the last two years, as we began to act in the spirit of new thinking, showed that we need practical results, we need a real-life test for the ideas we proposed and that we wanted to introduce into international political practice. The world was waiting for it and demanding it. The people’s trust in our new foreign policy depended on it. we wanted and strove to test these ideas in real life. And the problem of the INF Treaty was just the deciding factor in this.

It was a trial for us. But it was also a trial of our partners, the Americans; a trial of the earnestness of their approach to the key issue of today’s world. It was a practical test of the

statements they have made at the highest-level conferences, saying that nuclear war is unacceptable, that the U.S. is striving for disarmament, and that they want normal international relations.

Progress in this direction also opened the way for other areas of disarmament, namely nuclear, chemical and conventional weapons. It created the background for similar businesslike approaches to regional problems and bilateral relations.

The meeting in Washington was also an important test of another fundamental idea of new thinking—that its success and effectiveness depend on the state of affairs at home, and on *perestroika*.

This is not only a question of objectively tying the two processes together, and not only our sincere binding of the two, without any ulterior motives, in our conception, in our policies, and in the development of our theories. It is also a question of the world's perception and understanding of this connection. And even though it would seem that this is the moral side of the issue, it has also had enormous practical meaning.

In Washington we saw for the first time with our own eyes what great interest exists in everything that is happening here, in our *perestroika*. And the goodwill, even enthusiasm to a degree, with which prim Washington received us, was an indicator of the changes that have started taking place in the West. These changes evidence the beginning of the crumbling “image of the enemy,” and the beginning of the destruction of the “Soviet military threat” myth. That was momentous to us. And it was noticed throughout the world.

A visit is an official action. We went there for talks with the President and representatives of his administration. But we also met with America, with all kinds of America—the youth, intellectuals, artists, the press, business circles and even the official elite, the ones who serve the administration.

And another very important aspect of the visit was truly getting to know a world which is in essence different. You mutually recognize this world through common logic, which is dictated by the growing degree of integration and interdependency of the world.

Major American figures wanted to meet with us. There was even some bias in the newspapers, saying that Gorbachev did not come here only to talk with the President, he came to influence all of America, including the people who ultimately determine its economy and politics.

We also noted that our partners did not want to give anything specific to the press on the progress of the one-on-one talks with the President and the delegations. We were prepared to do this. Thus, we were clearly winning in the question of *glasnost*. This emphasized the sincerity and honesty of our position and the fact that we came to really get things done, to deal with political policy, not play the games of the past.

In our contacts with the different kinds of America we saw that our *perestroika* has even reached American society, which has been driven to the limit with anti-Sovietism. People were not troubled by the fact that we might be behind in some aspects, such as the economy. They were interested in the fact that our society has moved forward, that it is finding a new movement and is inspired to change democratically. As a matter of fact, this interested everybody, most of all during our contacts with the people.

We felt, perhaps for the first time, in Washington that the human factor is also [important] in world politics. Until then we had gone by a rather hackneyed formula: foreign policy is about personal contacts between leaders of countries, leaders of governments and in general exchanges at the level of those who make politics.

This is understood. But even with this idea we meant that even the personal contacts still took place between representatives of radically different and irreconcilable systems, and the people were only “representatives.” We saw Reagan only as the embodiment of the most conservative part of American capitalism and the masters of the military-industrial complex. But it turned out that at the same time the politicians, including the leading heads of state, if they are truly responsible people, also represent the purely human qualities, interests, and hopes of the common people—particularly of those people who vote for them in elections and who associate the country’s dignity and their patriotism with the politician’s name and personal qualities. At the same time, they can be guided by the most normal human motives and feelings. And it turns out that in our day all of this has enormous significance for making political decisions.

We were prepared and ourselves even strove to understand this aspect of relations with the American leadership, and with the leadership of other countries as well. In other words, we wanted to include the purely human factor into international political policy. This is an important aspect of the new thinking. And it has produced results. It seems in Washington we felt it distinctly for the first time.

The visit to Washington had another aspect as well—the European aspect. Undoubtedly, everybody expected results; undoubtedly, all serious politicians understood that all further development of world events would depend on the progress of Soviet-American relations.

At the same time there was another level of thinking—the bloc and national-ego thinking, which was superimposed with the ingrained ideas of a bipolar world and the idea that the decisive role belongs to the superpowers and they can do a great deal behind the backs of other states, against the interests of other states and at the expense of international politics. This came through especially, if you remember, in Reykjavik. There was a similar suspicion in the international atmosphere during our visit to Washington.

However, we were certain that the logic of disarmament would dispel these fears and suspicions. This would be especially relevant for Europe, since we were primarily dealing with European nuclear weapons.

Also, I wanted to let the American know that we will not pull back from the path to democratization. Of course, we also have to carefully mind its socialist nature. The people will

protect this aspect of the matter. Sometimes this protection is even reminiscent of conservatism, as if to say: we live modestly, but securely. The people value this.

But I have to say that some of our people are afraid of democracy. This fear is caused by the fact that working personnel do not want to change their work methods. Here is a story: in Yaroslavl the workers of one factory—27,000 people—spoke against management's independent decision. The comrades in the administration and in the party committee called headquarters, saying: be prepared, there might be a riot. That is what we do instead of talking with people. As it is, when they spoke with the people everything was settled and the arguments were understood, and the people agreed with management's decision. We are used to calling the firing squad as soon as anything happens!

We invite the people to participate in leading the government, we encourage them to act, to practice self-management, but the bosses won't let them. That's their democracy for you! In general we are developing this kind of a situation: some people are "renovationists," ardent followers of *perestroika* who are trying to get something done, who bruise themselves with mistakes but learn from them. Then there are the others, who are "always right," who sit and wait for the others to break their necks. In the Politburo we need to see all of this.

The Party is awakening to the new work. But this is happening slowly. We even see such things as engineers and specialists joining the apparatus of the Ministries and building a wall against the demands of the working class, against its striving for something new.

Comrades, we are in the middle of a real revolution! We should not be afraid of a revolutionary frenzy. Otherwise we will not achieve anything. There will be losses and retreats, but we will only be victorious on the tracks of revolution. Yet we still have not tuned ourselves over to revolutionary work methods. We are still quite the revolutionaries! We are all afraid of something.

We should not be afraid. And it suits us to appear to the whole world as people who are ready to go to the very limit in our revolutionary *perestroika*.

Some people speak of a convergence (Galbraith, for example), others speak of Gorbachev's unpredictability. They write about his surprises. *The Washington Post* published an article titled "The Two Gorbachevs." It is difficult for them to unite our striving for peace, collaboration, and good-neighborly relations with the socialist nature of *perestroika*. We ourselves have not quite mastered these dialectics.

So we should not be surprised that they cannot make ends meet and keep searching for some kind of dirty trick from Gorbachev, some kind of change in the Kremlin, which, it turns out, planned *perestroika* in its entirety only to trick the West and lull them out of their vigilance.

[Source: Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, Moscow
Translated by Anna Melyakova for the National Security Archive.]